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### Listen to Me

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# LISTEN TO ME

*Sister Edith Kahler*

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Alert, vivacious Jocelyn with eyes flashing rushed into the first-grade classroom. Her whole demeanor cried out for attention and when she entered the scene all things came to life. Her contributions during science class made the others sit up and take notice. Language classes held more spice when Jocelyn was present, and even the puppet show appeared more enticing. "Listen to ME" seemed to be the message conveyed by her alert eyes and even without saying it she captured her audience so that they sat spellbound. From all outward appearances, she was a well adjusted, stimulating, and intelligent learner—only her teacher held the real key to her secret.

Jocelyn was far from ready for READING. Her attention span was short; she had poor listening skills; her auditory and visual discrimination needed refining and even more crucial she was totally indifferent to reading. Her classmates sailed ahead of her in their reading progress but this seemed not to affect our little learner. There were too many other features in the classroom which held a fascination for her.

Fortunately, the class was small and because of its varied abilities and interests the teacher worked out an individualized reading program. Each child could progress at his own rate. The total class response was most gratifying. The individual child eagerly awaited his turn to read with his teacher. For an interval of about ten minutes the teacher and the child discussed, answered questions, read silently and orally while thoroughly enjoying the story and each other's presence. Soon these sessions became the highlight of the school day.

Even little Jocelyn vied in being chosen FIRST to read, although her early sessions were more listening and discussion periods. Relaxed, she sat by her teacher pleased that she was the object of complete attention. She would wiggle and squirm, rub her eyes, and often become so distracted that a mere five minute session was a chore for the teacher. Despite it all she seemed to look forward to these periods of mutual sharing.

Progress was slow as the year advanced and then at last—the miracle happened! Patience had borne fruit. It was the end of January. More than half the year had sped by and suddenly she changed and began to show a real interest in reading. Was it the new book, a hard covered primer, which the teacher most reluctantly gave her? Was it an awareness of the others in the class surpassing

her? Was it the desire to read a new book given her as a Christmas present? No. None of these factors were primary in her change. It was merely that NOW she was ready. Her teacher, although not pushing her in the individualized reading session, had taught her the basics required for reading success. Slowly and patiently she developed listening skills, left to right eye movement, visual and auditory discrimination and all the other skills basic to good reading. Finally, armed with these essential tools, Jocelyn was ready to use them.

This child's success story can be attributed to the worth of a well organized individual reading program. Here the emphasis is on the individual child . . . not the group. Each learner is in a personal one-to-one relationship with his teacher. No one vies or competes with another. No one is criticized before his peers. The result is a relaxed atmosphere for both the teacher and child alike. "Listen to me," cries each of our students. No, it is not enough to speak to them as a class but rather each craves for a personal relationship with the teacher—an opportunity for the pupil to feel that he is rather SPECIAL and here is someone who really cares about him.

Is it too premature to state that many a disabled reader may have found success if he had had a similar opportunity—a chance to advance at his own rate, without the pressures of the group ever present. The class clown who was failing in reading but not in entertaining his peers may never have been that distracting element if he were handled on an individualized basis. The shy, timid child may never have developed into the nervous youngster so sensitive to criticism. Surely this method would not be a solution to all disabled readers but there is a point to our LISTENING and CARING and focusing our attention on the individual.

Let us as teachers take a look at ourselves and our relationships with our students. They *need* us and care very much that we show this concern for them. Let us LISTEN to their pleas and develop in our children more beautiful readers . . . readers on their own level and fewer disabled readers.